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**FIRST FEDERAL KHAT PROSECUTION IN THE
EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

FRESNO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that a federal grand jury sitting in Fresno, California, has returned an indictment charging NAGI ALI RAGIH, 53, of Bakersfield, with possessing khat with intent to distribute. United States Attorney Scott believes it is the first federal prosecution in the Eastern District of California involving khat.

The case was investigated by the Bakersfield Police Department.

According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, khat is a naturally occurring stimulant derived from a shrub, which is primarily cultivated in East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Khat has two active ingredients, cathinone, a Schedule I controlled substance, which produces a euphoric effect similar to amphetamine, and cathine, a Schedule IV controlled substance, which produces a less intense stimulant effect. Khat is typically chewed like tobacco. Dried khat can be made into tea or a chewable paste. Khat can also be smoked. Although khat is legal throughout much of East Africa and the Arabian peninsula, it is illegal in the United States. Chronic khat abuse can result in symptoms such as physical exhaustion, violence, and suicidal depression, which are similar to amphetamine addiction.

According to public court records filed in Kern County, RAGIH, a native of Yemen, is the owner of Al Farooq Market in Bakersfield. The state court records allege that RAGIH stores and packages dried khat at his market and sells it from there for profit.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Karen A. Escobar of the Fresno United States Attorney's Office, who is prosecuting the case, RAGIH faces a maximum prison term of twenty years and a fine of up to \$1,000,000, if convicted.

The charges are only allegations and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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